

JN 276
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The Cohesive Elements of British Imperialism

By Alleyne Ireland

[Our readers will like to have a few personal notes about the author of this article. Mr. Ireland is a native of Manchester, England. His father was Alexander Ireland, the proprietor of the Manchester "Examiner and Times" and the friend and biographer of Ralph Waldo Emerson. His mother was the author of the "Life of Jane Welsh Carlyle." He was educated at the Manchester Grammar School, and subsequently studied at Berlin University. During the past twelve years Mr. Ireland has spent most of his time in the British Colonies. He lived for three years in Australia, and later spent seven years in the West Indies and in South America. During his stay in the West Indies he devoted himself to a study of tropical labor, taking the practical course of working on

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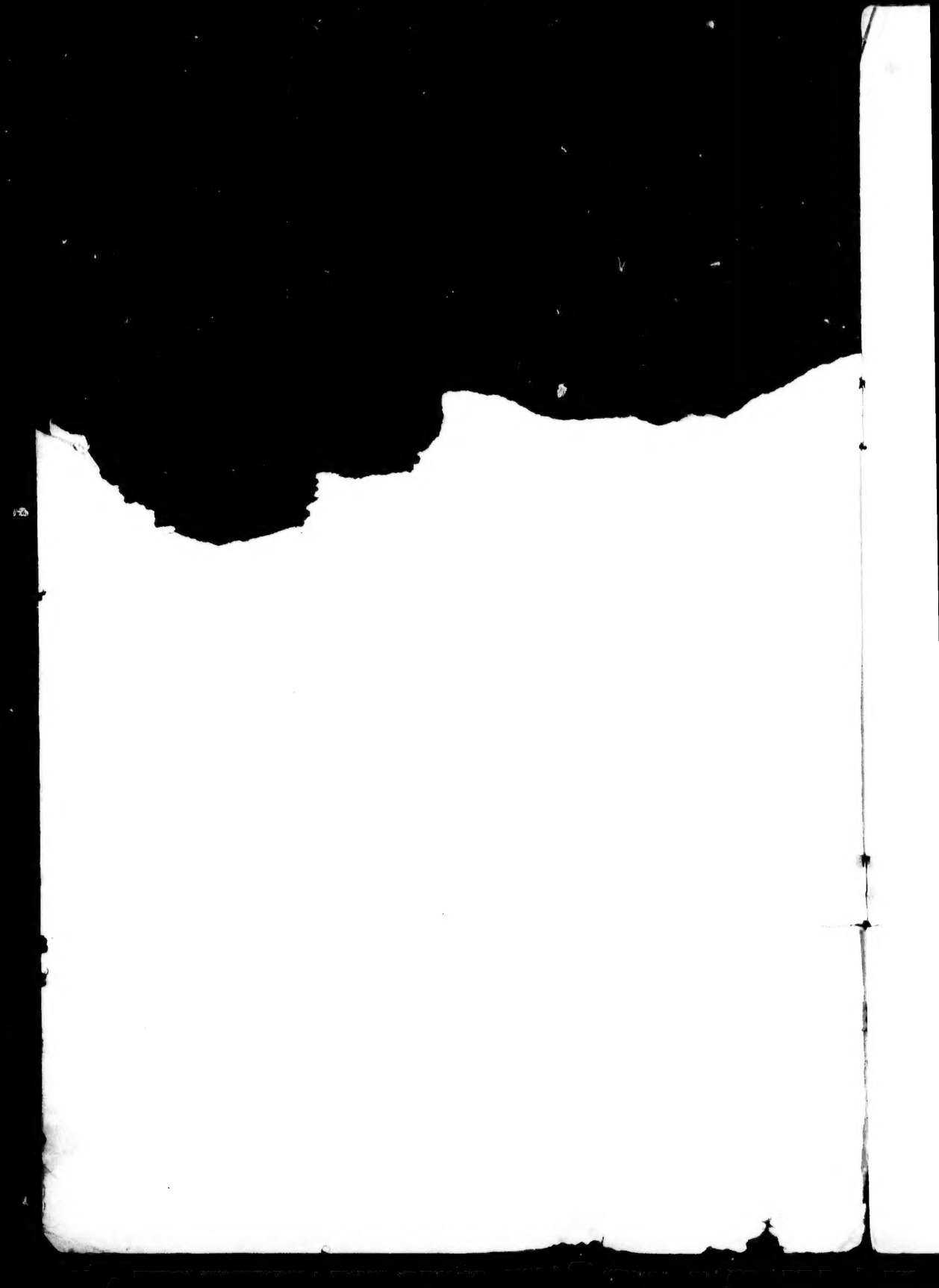
THE COHESIVE ELEMENTS OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

BY

ALLEYNE IRELAND

Author of "Tropical Colonization."

[REPRINTED FROM THE OUTLOOK OF DECEMBER 30, 1899.]



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ON June 22, 1897, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated throughout the British Empire. As her Majesty left Buckingham Palace to take part in that magnificent procession which marched through the streets of London to the accompaniment of the frenzied applause of three millions of people, she touched an electric button, and forthwith there went out to every part of the British dominions a message—to glaring, sun-scorched Aden, to the sweet green slopes of Barbados, to the lands where the Southern Cross hangs right overhead, to the wide waste-lands flushed by the Northern Lights—a simple message of greeting, "From my heart I thank my beloved people. May God bless them."

I was in British Guiana at the time, and heard the Governor of the Colony read the Queen's message in a public place to a large crowd of colonists.

Now, the point is this: Why should that crowd of negroes, coolies, Portuguese, and half-breeds have given itself up to the most enthusiastic expressions of delight? Why should there have been such a throwing up of caps, such a cheering and hurraing, such a lusty singing of the national anthem? Why, later in the day, should many thousands of people in that little, out-of-the-way colony close under the Line have gathered in and around the cathedral to offer up their heartfelt

thanks to God that a monarch whom they had never seen should have been spared to rule for sixty years in an island whose shores they had never visited? Why should the crowd which gathered round the Queen's statue that afternoon to hear the school-children sing "God Save the Queen" have been moved with one accord to join their voices to the childish anthem, until the song became a chorus, the chorus a joyful tumult? Why, when the swift tropical night had fallen, could I look out across the land and see glowing everywhere amidst the palms and the breadfruit trees, shining from the thickets of oleanders and hibiscus, in every house and hut, a lantern, or at least a candle, alight by way of rejoicing?

Why? The answer would fill volumes; it would be a history of British colonization. But, apart from matters of sentiment or emotion, there are so many things to be accounted for in the British colonies that there should be some interest even in a most brief and inadequate survey of the cohesive factors of British imperialism. For instance, I might continue my questionings in another direction, thus: Why do we find in the annals of the negro colonies of Great Britain no record of outrages on white women? Why is the page unstained by the story of a lynching? Why do we find a mulatto occupying the high office of Chief Justice in a British colony having a population of twenty

thousand whites? Why do we see the negro freely permitted to cast his vote in a British colony in which he forms a majority of the electorate? Why is the majority of the legislature in such a colony composed of colored men, the white population quietly acquiescing in the arrangement?

The statements implied in the foregoing questions indicate the existence of strong elements of cohesion in the British Empire. What are those elements? To deal only with the more obvious ones, it seems to me that we must claim predominance for four distinct factors—the high sense of personal loyalty to the sovereign, the absolute incorruptibility of British justice, the swift and strong executive power behind the colonial administrators, and the universal honesty and almost universal efficiency of the British Colonial Civil Service.

As regards the first, it is impossible for any one who has not lived in the British colonies to realize what a mighty force this loyalty is. I have seen a man almost torn to pieces for refusing to drink the Queen's health at a banquet in Melbourne; I have seen a drunken French sailor in St. Lucia soundly thrashed by a negro porter for spitting on a picture of the Queen in an illustrated paper. One must understand that there exists throughout the British colonies that sentiment which in these days is driving London wild over the abominable and vile attacks made on the Queen by the French "yellow press." It is in neglecting to count in this element of personal devotion to the sovereign throughout the colonies that Continental Europe falls into an absurd error when it congratulates itself on the smallness of the British army.

It may be said that the feeling is ridiculous, that it is incapable of bearing a logical examination. What if the Queen dies? What if you get a sovereign who is unworthy of the throne? Why should all these millions have any such feelings for a woman whom they have never seen? Such questions are idle. We may not be able to explain this loyalty on any scientific theory; but there is the fact. That the Queen must some day die we English realize with sad hearts. I, for one, am proud to be able to say that I know no Englishman who would not cheerfully lay

down his life that hers might be spared a while longer. But after her death we shall be bound together as closely by our common grief as during her life by our common love.

I have placed loyalty to the Queen first among the cohesive elements of British imperialism because the other factors which I have named are intimately associated with her reign, and are to a large extent the product of her influence.

Of the incorruptibility of British justice in England there is, I believe, a very general recognition. That the same quality marks British justice in the colonies, and more particularly that it is a characteristic of its administration in those colonies where the inhabitants belong to the inferior races, is not, I think, so universally appreciated. I give two instances which fell under my notice when I was in the West Indies. In British Guiana the labor supply consists chiefly of contract laborers imported from Calcutta. One of the conditions of the contract is that no deduction from the wages of the laborers can be made by an employer for any reason whatever. One night the watchman in a sugar-factory went to sleep while on duty, with the result that a fire occurred ending in the loss of thousands of dollars' worth of property. The planter in his anger refused to pay the watchman his wage for that night, on the ground that he had been hired to watch and he had not watched. The man appealed to the courts. The judge gave a verdict for the laborer and delivered a severe reprimand to the planter, whose action he characterized as an outrage.

Another instance which is instructive occurred last year in one of the West Indian islands. The Administrator of the island, the highest resident official, a man who had been in the British service for many years, committed a violent assault on a negro. There were some unpleasant details in the affair, and a woman was involved. The negro sued the Administrator before a magistrate, and obtained a conviction against him. There was no attempt to hush the matter up, and the Administrator stood convicted before the whole community. The outcome was that the official was dismissed from the colonial service.

I could quote a score of cases which

passed under my notice in which common negro or coolie laborers have secured verdicts against some of the most prominent white men in their communities.

At any rate, here is a great cohesive element—the absolute conviction in the minds of the masses that under British rule the highest official, the most powerful civilian, holds no advantage under the law over the meanest peasant or the poorest laborer.

To one acquainted with the judicial system in the British tropical colonies it is not surprising that this confidence should prevail.

All judicial appointments are made by the Crown, and only those men who have undergone a legal training and have been called to the Bar in one of the Inns of Court in London are eligible. But if a man possesses this qualification, no consideration of color or creed is allowed to weigh for or against him. Several instances are within my knowledge of negroes in humble positions in the British West Indies who have saved up their earnings in order to send a son to England to study for the Bar, and have lived to see such a son appointed to a magistracy.

All appointments to the judiciary in the British colonies are for life or during good behavior; and although it is most unusual for any judicial officer to so conduct himself as to merit dismissal, such cases have occurred on rare occasions and the officer has been promptly dismissed from the service. A case occurs to my mind in which the Chief Justice of British Guiana, some time during the seventies, was dismissed from his office after a Government Commission had inquired into certain charges made against him by the colonists. The circumstance has a double interest in that the dismissal followed the recommendation of a Commission composed of fellow-officials of the Chief Justice.

No judge or magistrate in the British colonies is allowed to engage in any occupation of any kind outside the exercise of his judicial functions, and the title "judge" belongs only to those officials who are actually in active service on the bench. If the result is that we appear somewhat scantily supplied with "judges," the custom has obvious advantages by way of compensation.

The salaries of the judges are high, and

place them entirely beyond the necessity of possessing private means. For instance, the Chief Justice of British Guiana, a colony with a population of 280,000, receives a salary of \$10,000, and the puisne judges receive \$7,500 each.

An excellent rule is observed in the appointment of colonial judges, namely, that connection with a colony by birth, family ties, or otherwise, disqualifies a man for appointment in that particular colony. This rule, it may be added, applies only to the higher fiscal appointments.

The independence of the judiciary is further protected by a tradition that the judges in a colony shall refrain from making extensive social relations among the colonists. It is felt, and with some justice, that the natives would not be edified by the spectacle of the judge dining at night with Mr. So-and-So, the rich merchant, and then adjudicating next day on some case in which he was concerned. The result is that the judges, as a rule, confine their circle of acquaintances to a few of the higher officials.

The strength of the executive power vested in the local authorities throughout the British colonies has served to mold the character of the lower races under British rule. Absolute freedom of speech is allowed in all the British colonies. You may convene public meetings for the purpose of calling the Governor an ass and a popinjay; you may write columns in the newspapers advocating all sorts of violence (except in India, where the circumstances are peculiar). The authorities will look on and smile indulgently. But start a riot, commit violence, destroy property, and, heigh, presto! the line is crossed, and down comes the strong hand. And it is to be noted—*first*, the violence is stopped; *then*, when all is quiet again, the inquiry takes place, the blame is fixed, and the civil law takes its course. It took England many, many years to learn this first simple lesson in the psychology of control; and volumes might be written containing nothing but the record of those unhappy experiences through which this wisdom was attained. Now the character of the people is being molded under the continued pressure of the consistent policy of "Talk all you will, but no violence." As the children in our tropical colonies grow to manhood and pass on to old age,

they are unable to find precedents which justify a hope that violence may go unpunished or that crime may go undetected. And when they observe that it is not only the black man who is held back from violence, but that the white man also must stay his hand in fear of the consequences, the strong confidence in the righteousness of British rule is borne in upon the natives, and we have another cohesive element in our Empire.

Before passing to the British Colonial Civil Service, I may digress for a moment in order to point out the wisdom of England in adopting several different forms of government in her Empire. It is true that this policy affords the world the curious spectacle of such widely diverse systems as the democratic rule in the United Kingdom and the autocratic Crown Colony government existing under one flag; but it is in facing the fact that democratic institutions are not suited for all men, instead of trying to fit the facts to a preconceived theory to the contrary, that England has shown her good sense.

Thus we find all the British colonies in which the population is of English stock enjoying complete self-government. In these colonies the Crown has no power to levy taxes or to decide in what manner the revenue must be expended. The legislature is elected by the people, and the only appointment within the gift of the Crown is the Governorship. It is interesting to note that all the British colonies enjoying complete self-government lie outside the tropics.

The colonies within the tropics are governed under one or another of two systems—the Crown Colony system, or the system under which there exist representative institutions without responsible government.

The former system places the affairs of the colony in the hands of trained officials who are under the immediate control of the Colonial Office, and it possesses this advantage, that the administrators are free from local prejudice and are unhampered by the constant antagonism of local elected assemblies.

The latter system is more liberal in spirit, for it enables the people of the colony to voice their sentiments through their representatives in the local legislatures, and places in the hands of the pop-

ular body the raising of taxes and the granting of the civil list. But, as the Crown has the power of controlling all legislation in the last resort, the representation is, in fact, effective only so long as the legislation follows the lines approved by the Colonial Office.

In the tropical colonies enjoying representative institutions voters are required to have a property qualification; but no distinction of race or color is made, and in several of these colonies the majority of the electorate consists of colored men. As the colored man has his vote in fact as well as on paper, it is not unusual to see a majority of the elected members of a local legislature colored men.

But the colonial system of Great Britain would be a miserable failure, despite the good intentions of the Home Government, were it not that the administrative work is in the hands of honest and capable men.

The honesty of the civil servants in Greater Britain is attested by the fact that during the past twenty years there have not been brought to light a dozen cases of official corruption in the higher branches of the service, which administers the affairs of about 400,000,000 people. Although the efficiency of the service is of a high order, I do not think it is equal to its honesty; but the system is worked in the manner best calculated to secure men of ability, and the course of training insures the development of the best powers that lie in a man.

A youth enters the service in some humble capacity, and is moved about freely from one part of the Empire to another. By the time he reaches a post of responsibility he has accumulated an amount of experience in administrative work which enables him to face his duties with a wholesome conviction that he can honorably acquit himself. He has his life's work before him. He knows that promotion lies in his own hands, that when the Colonial office is considering his advancement it will not ask, What is this man's color? what are his politics? but simply, What is this man's working record?

The service offers high salaries, permanence of appointment, liberal provisions for leave, a pension or provision for widows and orphans, and unlimited scope

for the realization of all reasonable ambitions. This being so, it is easy to understand that men of a high type are eager to enter the examinations for Civil Service appointments, and that consequently the Government has a wide range of selection.

The *morale* of the service is high, for, in addition to the ordinary motives which guide gentlemen in their actions, the conviction is present in the mind of each member that, if he so conduct himself as to bring discredit on the honorable service to which he belongs, no influence will save him from dismissal. One of the strongest cohesive factors in the British Empire is the belief which exists among all classes that, whatever may be the mistakes of policy, whatever the blunders of local officials, the money paid for the expenses of government is expended for the public good, and does not go into the pockets of the rulers.

The spirit which animates the Colonial Service of Great Britain is that of a true realization of the beauty and excellence of honest work, of satisfaction in obstacles overcome, of joy in the accomplished thing.

Were the guiding Genius of British imperialism to address the youth setting out on his career as a colonial servant, we may imagine her saying: "Go to the man with whom you have to deal, learn his language, study his habits, enter into his life, understand his superstitions, rejoice with him, mourn with him, heal his sick, respect his dead, stand by his side in work and in play, in health and in sickness. And as time passes your work will become a tradition, a tradition by which the natives will measure every new man and by which every new man will measure his work. And when you have taught the native that you are not with him to make money out of him, to wean him from his gods, to

oppress him and ill use him, and when he has taught you to understand the strange workings of his heart, to sympathize with the ever-present conflict within him of strong emotions and a weak will, you will reap that reward which cannot be measured by any standard—the knowledge that as a man you have gone out into the waste places of the earth and done man's work."

After this article had gone to the printer news arrived of serious reverses to British arms in South Africa. The British Empire is on trial before the whole world, and we see all the British colonies eager to afford assistance to the mother country in the time of her need. The question which is being settled is whether England is powerful enough to protect her subjects throughout the world, whether there is or is not any significance to the expression, "*Civis Britannicus sum*." My own feeling is that England has never been called on to face a situation so full of dangerous possibilities, and that now is the time when the moral fiber of the British Empire is to be put to the test. It will be seen whether the cohesive elements of British Imperialism are powerful enough to preserve the unity of the Empire in such a crisis as this, when almost the whole of Europe is rejoicing over the temporary failure of British military power, when the foe she is fighting is encouraged and assisted by the presence and advice of European military experts. For my part, I have no fear as to the ultimate issue of the present conflict. Despite the hostility of Europe, nay, even should that hostility take the form of intervention, the day has not come when the magnificent edifice of British Imperialism, with all that it means for humanity, civilization, and progress, is to clatter to the ground like a house of cards.
